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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001684

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: FORMER PRESIDENT OF FINLAND AHTISAARI
BROUGHT IN FOR CONSULTATIONS ON GON-MAOIST DIALOGUE

REF: KATHMANDU 1677

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary. Former President of Finland Marti Ahtisaari paid a three-day visit to Nepal August 28-30 at the request of British aid agency DFID to provide assistance to the facilitators of the GON-Maoist peace talks. During a meeting with Ambassador Malinowski, Ahtisaari expressed optimism that, despite resumed violence, a negotiated political settlement between the government and the insurgents eventually could be reached. He questioned, however, the viability of holding elections with the Maoists as a legitimate political party until the insurgents have laid down their arms. Ahtisaari's visit planned by DFID, although well-intentioned, did nothing to further the peace process and caused some consternation within the GON and the Indian Embassy. End Summary.

12. (C) On August 29, Ambassador Malinowski met with former President of Finland Marti Ahtisaari to discuss the prospects for peace in Nepal. Ahtisaari said he had been approached two weeks prior, with the support and assistance of British aid agency DFID, by the four facilitators to the Maoist-Government of Nepal dialogue asking Ahtisaari to travel to Nepal to make an assessment and offer advice on how to move the peace process forward. Ahtisaari agreed to the visit, which he made from August 28 - 30.

13. (C) During his visit, Ahtisaari spent over three hours with the facilitators and the Government of Nepal's lead negotiator and Minister of Finance, Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani. (Note. The facilitators have been disbanded as a result of the break in the cease-fire. (Reftel) End Note.) After these discussions, Ahtisaari observed that the only way to resolve the conflict would be to provide conditions under which the Maoists could play a role in government through national elections. However, any election would require international supervision, he said. Ahtisaari questioned the need for a constituent assembly and suggested that both sides first agree on a constitutional framework, such as constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy, that would provide the basis from which to proceed. He concluded that the Maoist insurgency and political crisis in Nepal are not as bad as that with the LTTE in Sri Lanka.

14. (C) Ahtisaari asked the Ambassador for his assessment of Maoist intentions and the possibility of renewed peace talks. The Ambassador replied that the main problem centers around what the Maoists expect to get from negotiations with the government, namely that the insurgents want control over elections and, ultimately, over the government. However, the Ambassador opined, the Maoists may be miscalculating the impact of their terror campaign on GON thinking. Maoist threats to bomb the capital and attempts to assassinate political and military leaders will not cause the GON to capitulate to Maoist demands, he said.

15. (C) Ahtisaari expressed concern that the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) had not used the seven-month long cease-fire to improve and expand the counter-insurgency effort. Ambassador Malinowski pointed out, however, that the RNA had used the cease-fire to fortify its bases around the country so that mass attacks by the Maoists will be less likely to succeed. The Ambassador suggested that there are four components to the peace effort. First, Nepal's constitutional forces -- the King and political parties -- must come together and present a unified front against the insurgents. Second, the GON must begin to address the root causes of the conflict by distributing resources more fairly and including disenfranchised groups, such as women and members of the low-castes, into the political system. Third, the GON must improve the ability of its security forces to protect the Nepali people. Fourth, the international community must support the GON against the Maoists, assist the GON's development effort, and build the GON's capacity to negotiate with the insurgents.

16. (C) Ambassador Malinowski warned, however, that the Government of India is very sensitive to third-party involvement in resolving the Maoist conflict in Nepal and recommended strongly that Ahtisaari pay a visit to Indian

Ambassador Shyam Saran during his stay in Kathmandu. Ahtisaari agreed to see Ambassador Saran as well as the British Ambassador before leaving the country. Ahtisaari said that because the Maoist leadership is now in hiding, he would not have the chance to meet with them. He intended perhaps to hold a separate meeting with talks facilitator Padma Ratna Tuladhar and journalist Shyam Shrestha, both known to be surrogate Maoists with close ties to political leader Baburam Bhattarai. Ahtisaari did not expect to return to Nepal for a second visit.

17. (U) Biographic Note: Marti Ahtisaari was elected President of the Republic of Finland in 1994 and held office until 2000. Shortly after leaving office, Ahtisaari assumed the Co-Chairmanship of the East-West Institute based in New York and Chairmanship of the International Crisis Group based in Brussels. In June 2003, U.N. General Secretary Kofi Annan appointed Ahtisaari as a U.N. Special Envoy for the Humanitarian Crisis in the Horn of Africa. He has also done a significant amount of work furthering peace in the Balkans. End Biographic Note.

18. (C) Comment. Although Marti Ahtisaari's visit was well-intentioned, it did not appear to have a significant impact on the peace process (especially since the facilitators for the peace talks were relieved of their duties). Moreover, DFID provided the GON with little prior notice, and the Indian Embassy no advance notice, of this high-profile visit. DFID, which has advocated direct donor contact with the Maoists, has been criticized by Palace officials who are suspicious of DFID's activities and feel that the development agency is ignoring political and security sensitivities surrounding the Maoist insurgency. When finally informed, the Indian Ambassador privately expressed ire over DFID's actions in this regard. Although Post does not necessarily agree with the Indian position on the possible value of outside mediation, we do not advise antagonizing the Indians over this issue at a time when the Indians are increasing the level of their cooperation with Nepal and other countries on the Maoist insurgency. Post believes it is important that the U.S., UK and India maintain a common message toward the Maoists and fear that DFID may be countermanding this effort. End Comment.

MALINOWSKI